

# News Release

# Senator Pete V. Domenici

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DOMENICI: LOS ALAMOS FIRE VICTIMS SHOULD BE MADE WHOLE BECAUSE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAUSED DEVASTATING FIRE

### Organizes Tuesday N.M. Congressional Delegation Meeting to Assess Recovery Needs for Drought-Ridden State

WASHINGTON -- As part of his weekly radio show, U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today asserted that New Mexicans who lost homes in the still-raging Cerro Grande fire should be made whole because the federal government caused the blaze that wiped out nearly 400 Los Alamos homes last week.

Domenici today organized a Tuesday meeting for members of the New Mexico congressional delegation to begin setting the course for congressional action for the recovery effort,. The meeting is scheduled for 3:30 p.m. (EDT) in Washington.

"If it is ultimately proven that the National Park Service made a mistake by setting this fire, then we should pay for it. Right now, I'm most concerned about housing, the clean up and the people being able to return to normalcy as soon as possible. All of those will cost the government some money," Domenici said.

"I think common sense tells us now that the federal government is responsible because the fire was started by the National Park Service, either mistakenly or by error, in the Bandelier. We should now begin to set up a mechanism, a place in the law that outlines what we're responsible for, to make those families and the community whole," he said.

"I want the delegation to get together so we can begin to talk about collective actions we can take. It's imperative that we pool our skills and resources so we will know as soon as possible what we should do for Los Alamos and neighboring communities to meet the government's responsibility in making the community whole again. These are not easy questions, but if we work together we will be doing the very best we can in a very difficult situation," he said.

Domenici, who serves on the Senate Appropriations Committee, today discussed the Cerro Grande Fire and its aftermath with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and has been conferred with Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Senator Ted Stevens on potential emergency federal funding that may be necessary for fire recovery efforts. At Domenici's request, Stevens toured the

disaster area on Sunday.

Domenici noted that legislation may be needed to authorize the federal government to provide additional aid to the Cerro Grande Fire victims to make them whole.

“Our relief needs may go beyond the normal emergency and disaster relief offered by the government. In an act of God disaster, we do not necessarily make victims whole but offer to help them with loans and subsidies. But in this case, I hope we can make them whole. It’s something we’ll have to work on up here, and I hope we can work together as a delegation on it,” Domenici said. “I know some small business subsidies are needed, and those should be available too. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is setting up a headquarters to start that aid.”

Members of the New Mexico congressional delegation include: Domenici, Senator Jeff Bingaman, Representative Joe Skeen, Congresswoman Heather Wilson, and Representative Tom Udall.